

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

GOSHEN

Report Date: 1982

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: December 1982

COMMUNITY: Goshen

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Goshen, the northernmost town in Hampshire County, is dominated by a series of moderate uplands that comprise part of the eastern foothills of the Green Mountains of Vermont. Most elevations range between 1200 feet and 1450 feet. Moore Hill (1697 feet) located in the northeastern corner of Goshen and Mollison Hill (1601 feet) situated slightly northwest of the village of Goshen extend over 1500 feet above sea level. These uplands are broken by a number of swampy intervals, most prominent of which is Sears Meadow, formerly known as the "Great Meadow Swamp," which originally was the site of a large beaver pond. Goshen lacks any major waterways. The western portion of town is drained by the Swift River and Fuller Brook which flow into the Westfield River. Eastern Goshen is drained by the West Branch of the Mill River which eventually flows into the Connecticut River. The town contains several bodies of fresh water, the most prominent of which are the Highland Lakes, two large mill ponds situated in northwestern Goshen.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Goshen was originally included with Narragansett Township Number 4 (Chesterfield) and surveyed for division in 1739 with its eastern boundary at the Hatfield Addition (Williamsburg). The northern district was surveyed as an additional grant in 1740 (Chesterfield Gore) with a northern boundary at Huntstown (Ashfield) and a western line with Township Number 5 (Cummington). The southern district formed within the town of Chesterfield in 1762 and the northern Gore district annexed in 1763. Chesterfield Gore was established as an independent district in 1778 and incorporated as the town of Goshen in 1781, including the northeast section of Chesterfield, which was defined as stepped boundary with Goshen by 1789. A small section in the northeast was annexed from Conway in 1785.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Goshen is a recreational hill town on the primary western corridor from Northampton to Pittsfield. It is located in the Berkshire highlands along the upper drainage of Mill River, with reported native tool sites around Mount Rood in Lithia. It was settled from Chesterfield during the Colonial period with its town center formed at Goshen village after the Revolution, including a surviving frame of a late 18th century meeting house and later Greek Revival civic buildings. Limited agricultural potential existed on the uplands with early 19th century farmsteads remaining along Chesterfield Road and notable Federal houses around the town center on Ball Road and Cape Road near Sears Meadow. Secondary development of Lithia as a local craft village

occurred during the mid 19th century with a period saw mill and houses. There was increasing advantage of recreational sites by early 20th century from Northampton along the Route 9 auto axis. Period summer camps survive at Mountain Rest and around Highland Lakes-DAR State Forest, with notable Shingle Style houses and a neoclassic library in Goshen Center. Present development is evident as suburban housing along the scenic vistas of the Route 9 corridor to Highland Lakes with Goshen Center suffering from heavy traffic volume. Outlying farmsteads retain their historic character with the restoration of the Mountain Rest resort compound at Lithia.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

There was a primary corridor across the Berkshire uplands with connections to the Connecticut River Valley. There was an apparent east-west trail from the Mill River (Williamsburg) which likely followed West Branch as Old Goshen Road - South Main Street to Mollison Hill (Goshen Center) and west as Route 9 to East Brook (Lithia) with a probable branch north as Route 112 around Mount Road. Other conjectured trails may have followed north-south from Hammond Pond along Chesterfield Road to Sears Meadow.

B. Settlement Patterns

There were no reported native Contact period sites. Some undated native artifacts have been recovered from western Goshen. Period occupation was probably restricted to small to moderate sized fishing and hunting encampments. Likely locations would be the uplands and intervalles in the general vicinity of Route 9, a primary native trail.

C. Subsistence Patterns

Limited horticultural production may have been undertaken on some of the gentler uplands, particularly those adjacent to Route 9. Native fishing probably occurred in local waterways such as the Swift River, East Brook, and the West Branch of the Mill River. Hunting likely focused along the Swift River and East Brook and the swampy intervalles such as Sears Meadow and Lily Pond.

D. Observations

Goshen was probably a secondary resource area for the heavily settled riverine villages of the Norwottucks located in Northampton and Hatfield. Regionally, this area most likely fell under the control of the Pocumtucks (centered in Deerfield), the dominant native group in the Middle Connecticut River Valley in the early 17th century. The likelihood of extant archaeological evidence of period occupation should be greatest in the general vicinity of Route 9 and Sears Meadow.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

The primary east-west route from Northampton to the Housatonic Valley apparently was maintained along the Route 9 axis from the West Branch of the Mill River.

B. Population

The Goshen area probably continued to be occupied by small to moderate sized native bands. The frequency and extent of such occupation may have increased as a result of colonial occupation of the more attractive native riverine lands.

The town lacked a colonial population until the early 1760s.

C. Settlement Patterns

Native settlement patterns were likely similar to those suggested for the Contact period.

Those individuals tending the Hatfield cattle in Sears Meadow may have established temporary shelters in the vicinity during their stay.

D. Economic Base

Native subsistence patterns were probably basically the same as those described in the preceding period. Establishment of the Anglo-Indian fur trade in the Middle Connecticut River Valley very likely encouraged increased native hunting and trapping of fur bearing animals.

Hatfield settlers cut and stacked hay in Sears Meadow prior to colonial settlement (ca.1761). In the winter, Hatfield cattle were driven to this location to feed on the hay. It is unclear if the livestock were kept there throughout the winter. Occasional hunting or lumbering may have been undertaken in Goshen by Hatfield settlers.

E. Observations

Goshen probably continued to remain primarily a native resource area. Colonial interest in this area was limited because of the availability of large tracts of high quality agricultural land in the Connecticut River Valley and Goshen's vulnerability to native attack.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

A survey of Narragansett township Number 4 in 1739 and Chesterfield Gore in 1740 established division highways with the formation of Chesterfield town (1762), including a north-south axis of

Cape-Chesterfield Roads and the east-west grid of Pond Hill, Chesterfield, Ball and Wing Hill-East Roads. Other north-south highways followed the topographic grain along Wing Hill Road, Sears Road and Shaw Road. The primary east-west highway improved as Old Goshen Road-Main Street (Route 9) from Williamsburg to Cummington during the Revolution.

B. Population

It is unclear if Goshen had a native period population. Small bands of hostile natives may have intermittently established camps in Goshen during the Indian wars of the 18th century.

There were no figures for Goshen's colonial population. Period settlers were former residents of a large number of Massachusetts and Connecticut settlements. A large number moved from Middle Connecticut River towns and southeastern Massachusetts. Others were from Tisbury and Woodstock, Connecticut and Long Island.

C. Settlement Patterns

Colonial settlement was dispersed and limited. The first settlement did not take place until ca.1761 when David Stearns and Abijah Tucker built homes in western Goshen, approximately one mile west of the present village of Goshen. Succeeding period settlement took place in this general area along Ball Road, further north in the vicinity of Mollison Hill, and in northeastern Goshen. Local residents probably attended church services in private homes or Chesterfield, since Goshen lacked its own meeting house.

D. Economic Base

Colonial settlers focused primarily on agriculture. Lumbering was probably undertaken by local farmers in area woodlands during the fall and winter months. Period industrial development was modest. The first mill (saw) was established by Reuben Dresser on "Dresser Brook" (Page Brook) prior to 1775. John Williams began operation of a grist mill in the vicinity of the junction of West Branch and East Street in the late 18th century. A pre-1775 tannery located on the site of the home of William H. Webster was put into operation by Oliver Taylor. The settlement appears to have had at least one period tavern. John Williams established a tavern on Mollison Hill prior to 1781 (Sylvester 1879:I,48).

E. Architecture

Residential: Only one pre-1775 house is known to survive in the town. This is the Christopher Banister House (1770), a center chimney cottage with five-bay center entrance facade and end gable overhang.

F. Observations

Goshen was one of a number of upland towns in the Connecticut

River Valley study unit that were established as the years of Anglo-Indian conflict were coming to a close. Settlement of these upland areas was largely the result of termination of Anglo-Indian hostilities and dwindling amounts of high quality land in the Connecticut River Valley. Future research should clarify development of the colonial settlement during this period. Existing secondary sources provide only limited data.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

The location of the Goshen meeting house in 1782 established a radial focus from the town center, with an axis along Main Street (Route 9) and connecting highways of East, Cape and Chesterfield Roads. There was continued improvement of the east-west corridor as Berkshire Road (Route 9) from Williamsburg to Lithia through Goshen Center as Main Street.

B. Population

Goshen's population peaked in the year 1800 at 724 persons, a figure the town would not reach again until the 1970s. Only three other towns in the county peaked as early as 1800 (Greenwich, Middlefield, and Williamsburg), but of the three, only Greenwich, like Goshen, showed a net loss in population between 1790 and 1830. In the latter year, Goshen's population, 617, was 64 less than it had been 40 years earlier.

C. Settlement Patterns

The meeting house location in 1782 established the civic focus at Goshen Center along Main Street (Route 9). A secondary mill village developed at Lithia on East Brook, with highland farming expanded to the limits along Chesterfield Road and around Sears Meadow.

D. Economic Base

It was primarily an agricultural economy in Goshen, although grazing was more successful than tillage. Several small tanneries were in operation throughout the period, and one sumac bark mill intended to produce material for export to European morocco tanneries, ca.1788 (though unsuccessful). The Mill and Swift rivers and various tributaries provided numerous small mill privileges, utilized for grist and saw mills by the 1780s and 1790s. Ambrose Stone's fulling mill and clothier's shop (1780) was said to be the earliest in the area (preceding similar Williamsburg mills?). Stone later moved to Williamsburg where he built a woolen mill on the site of James's later woolen mill. Small specialized woodworking shops were probably begun in the 1820s. Stone's sawmill (1828), said to have been the first factory for turning broom handles by machinery, although broom handles were made subsequently in at least four other shops in town.

E. Architecture

Residential: Approximately a dozen Federal period houses and cottages, almost all of center chimney plan, survive in Goshen. Cottages comprise a majority of the structures. Period houses surviving date from the late 1770s through the end of the period and include the Cyrus Lyon House (1777), the Willard Packard House (1792), and the Cyrus Stearns House (1812). Period structures are dispersed throughout the town with examples noted on Main Street, Spruce Corner, East, Ball and Beal Roads.

Institutional: Goshen's original 1782 meeting house stands on Main Street at the town center. It is a simple two-and-a-half story structure six bays long by four bays wide with a gable roof; the facade features a shallow two-bay wide, two-story entrance with double entrances. The structure's present location, one-story belfry and roof all date from 1834; after the original roof was blown off in a tornado, the building was moved and repaired. The repairs were made by Caleb Loud of Westhampton, builder of the present Westhampton meeting house (1829). A second Congregational society, founded in 1819, was defunct by 1855. Also organized in the period was a Baptist society (1818), which built a meeting house in 1822; that building is not known to survive and the society disbanded ca.1850. Four school districts were established in 1781 and at least two schools were built at that time; none are known to survive. The only other extant institutional building is the Lithia Post Office (1816), a one-story, hip roofed building.

Commercial: Two taverns of the period still stand. These are the Williams Tavern (1779) and the Nehemiah May Tavern (1805). Both are two-story center chimney structures with seven-bay facades. The Williams Tavern facade is irregularly organized and consists of a standard center entrance five-bay portion and a two-bay portion with center entrance. The May Tavern has seven evenly spaced bays across the facade.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

The local highway system remained focused around Goshen Center with the primary axis as Main Street (Route 9) to Lithia. No railroads were projected or constructed through the area.

B. Population

Goshen's population continued to decline. Between 1830 and 1870 the town lost 40% of its population. Its immigrant population (8 Irish) amounted to 1.9%, making the town one of only four towns in the county with an immigrant population less than 2%.

C. Settlement Patterns

Goshen Center remained as the civic focus with a street village extended along Main Street (Route 9). Local industrial activity

continued at Lithia with mill reservoirs formed at Highland Lakes (1845) for downstream manufacture (Williamsburg). Dairy farming remained active as highland agriculture along Chesterfield Road with lumbering on upland slopes.

D. Economic Base

Goshen's limited wooden implement industry expanded marginally in the Early Industrial period. Though broom handles, valued at \$3,000 were the largest single item manufactured in 1837, in subsequent years children's wagons, ladders, and a variety of wooden ware were also produced. The largest operation to grow out of this was a maker of bench and fancy planes, the Union Tool Company, in operation probably only for a few years in the 1850s. The company, near the village center, employed 20 and turned out a product valued at \$20,000, according to Holland. The same writer also noted two smaller plane makers.

In 1840 Goshen felt the impact of its increasingly industrial neighbor to the east, Williamsburg. The Mill River Reservoir Company was incorporated that year to construct the first of two storage reservoirs for Williamsburg mills. Named in the act were Stephen Brewer and Luther C. Clark. The reservoir, constructed that year, is now Lower Highland Lake.

E. Architecture

Residential: Approximately a dozen houses and cottages, the majority pre-1850 Greek Revival structures, still stand in Goshen. These include roughly equal numbers of conservative center chimney plan and sidehall plan structures. One regionally significant adaptation of the center hall plan should also be noted: that is, construction of one-and-a-half story, five-bay, center entrance facade cottages which incorporate small half-size windows just below the freize in the half story. Greek Revival cottages with freize windows were built in many of the western highland towns of Hampshire County in the 1840s and 1850s; an example is the Merritt Homestead (1846) at Lithia. The sidehall Greek Revival George Dresser House (1846) and the double chimney, center hall Rufus Cowles House (1845) are typical of the period. After 1850, comparatively few houses were built in the town.

Institutional: The First Congregational meeting house was moved and repaired after a tornado in 1834 and underwent some further repairs (unspecified) in 1858. The Baptist meeting house (built 1822) burned after being sold in 1862. The only other institutional activity known was the founding of a Seventh Day Adventist church in 1851.

Commercial: The Highland House hotel was established ca.1850 in an 1818 tavern; the building was destroyed by fire in 1867. Its successor, also the Highland Hotel, was demolished in 1940.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

There was an attempted improvement of the east-west corridor with a proposed railroad from Williamsburg (1887). The local road system remained centered around Goshen village along the Route 9 axis. No trolley lines were projected or constructed.

B. Population

Goshen's population continued to decline for most of the period, as did that of virtually all the other hill towns in the valley. A momentary pause in the decline, 1905-15, was not enough to offset the net loss of 70 persons over the course of the period.

The absolute number of the town's foreign-born residents remained relatively constant and negligible.

C. Settlement Patterns

The civic focus was maintained at Goshen Center with a secondary industrial village at Lithia along Main Road (Route 9), including a summer resort at Mountain Rest (1902) from New York City. Dairy farming continued active along Chesterfield Road.

D. Economic Base

Goshen continued to produce some wooden ware, broom and brush handles, and button molds for much of the period, but as a general indication of its manufacturing economy, the total value of the manufactured products in 1875 (\$4,350) was the lowest of the 23 towns in Hampshire County.

Williamsburg industrialists built a second storage reservoir (now Upper Highland Lake) in 1873, ironically a year before the collapse of a similar dam in Williamsburg which wiped out much of that town's industry. (Because of the upper lake's location on the watershed between the Mill and Westfield rivers, the reservoir required a large dike at the northern end to keep water from overflowing down the Westfield system). But in Goshen the two storage reservoirs became part of the attraction of summer residents to the town, begun at least by the 1870s. Highland House, a large and convenient hotel, by 1879 was "a favorite with summer tourists who have discovered how charming a place this mountain village is in the hot months of the year" (Sylvester). The construction in 1902 of Mountain Rest, a missionary society's summer retreat, marked the beginning of summer resort camps by institutional sponsors.

Goshen did have valued minerals and granite quarries, though none seemed to have been tapped to a great extent. An interest in a lithium-bearing mineral in the 1890s was responsible for the name of the postal village Lithia, coined in 1898.

E. Architecture

Residential: Very few houses were built in the period; with the exception of summer camp development, which began at Mountain Rest in Lithia in 1902 and later around Highland Lakes, residential construction was limited to a few modest one-and-a-half and two-story sidehall and L-plan Queen Anne houses. Period houses were observed on Main Street, East Street and Spruce Corner Road. Only one house of outstanding architecture was observed; this is a double chimney, gambrel roofed shingled Colonial Revival house at Goshen Center.

Institutional: The only institutional building known for the period is the John James Memorial Hall and Library at the town center. The building is a one-and-a-half story neoclassical structure built of fieldstone with a monumental Doric portico; it appears to date ca.1910. In 1901, the Goshen Park Camp Meeting Assembly was established.

Commercial: Period commercial activity included the establishment of Mountain Rest camp at Lithia in 1902 and of Camps Holy Cross and Jollee.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

Continued improvement of the east-west axis occurred with auto highway Route 9 from Northampton to Pittsfield through Goshen Center and a secondary connector as Route 112 from Lithia to Ashfield.

B. Population

Although Goshen's population reached its nadir in 1920 at 224 persons, it rose only slightly above that figure by 1940, giving the town a net loss for the period of 52 persons.

C. Settlement Patterns

Goshen Center remained the civic focus along the Main Street axis (Route 9) with summer cabins developed along Lower Highland Lake from Northampton and DAR State Forest (opened 1929) around Upper Highland Lake and Moore Hill. Lithia remained a local craft village with dairying maintained on highland sites.

D. Economic Base

In the Early Modern period, the town's major economic stimulus came from the growing "vacation industry." Several summer youth camps were established and in 1929 the Massachusetts Chapter of the DAR donated 1020 acres to the state to be preserved as a wildlife sanctuary. When the Hampshire County Reservoir Company threatened to drain the Highland Lakes, the State purchased them and added them to the DAR forest, using the CCC to develop facilities for public use. The town's permanent residents

engaged predominantly in dairying, poultry raising, lumbering and maple sugaring.

E. Architecture

The bulk of the town's residential construction consisted of one-story summer cottages built around Highland Lakes in the 1920s. In 1923, the Center School, a one-and-a-half story T-plan gable roofed Colonial Revival building with a pedimented entrance portico and central cupola, was built on Main Street at the town center.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

General: Goshen's survey is partially completed. Most pre-1820 structures and probably all pre-1800 structures - residential, institutional and commercial - have been inventoried. Not recorded are later institutional buildings, notable houses (such as the Colonial Revival house at the town center) and significant areas of developemnt, including Lithia and Highland Lakes.

XII. SOURCES

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